



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**  
**REGION 8, MONTANA OFFICE**  
**FEDERAL BUILDING, 301 S. PARK, DRAWER 10096**  
**HELENA, MONTANA 59626-0096**

Ref: 8MO

July 6 , 2000

Ms. Janette S. Kaiser, Forest Supervisor  
Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest  
420 N. Barret St.  
Dillon, MT 59725

Re: Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the  
Discovery Ski Area

Dear Ms. Kaiser:

In accordance with our responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, the Environmental Protection Agency, Region VIII, Montana Office (EPA) has reviewed the above-referenced Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

The EPA appreciates the effort of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest in preparing this DEIS to analyze alternatives and impacts for expansion of the Discovery Ski Area. The EPA does not object to Discovery Ski Area expansion, but the need for expansion is not well supported by the information presented in the DEIS. The EPA believes that the purpose and need for ski area expansion beyond existing permit boundaries should be better supported and documented in the FEIS.

The USFS has traditionally looked at ski resorts with at least 50% utilization as potentially in need of expansion (e.g., White River Forest Plan DEIS). Discovery Basin is only experiencing 30% utilization (page 1-6). We believe that the FEIS should include information on how many times per season skier-at-one-time (SAOT) capacity exceedances take place, and by how much SAOT is being exceeded. In addition information describing on-slope skier densities and lift line length should be provided to better support the contention that ski runs are overcrowded.

In addition, we do not believe the indirect impacts associated with the projected 25 percent increase in skier capacity at Discovery have been adequately disclosed and presented in the DEIS. Indirect effects include growth inducing effects and other effects related to induced changes in the pattern of land use, population density or growth rate and related effects on air and water and other natural systems, including ecosystems. The FEIS should identify and discuss indirect effects or induced changes that may be associated with the ski area expansion (and potential 25% increase in skier capacity), or at least make a good faith effort to explain the effects that are not known but are "reasonably foreseeable".



Will additional skier service, skier accommodation or ski vacation home type growth and land use change be induced on private land nearby the ski area due to ski area expansion? Will these induced developments have an effect on air, water, and other natural systems? Are there environmentally sensitive areas such as riparian areas and wetlands or other important wildlife habitat within reasonable proximity that may be affected as an indirect response to Discovery Ski Area expansion and increased skier use? In particular RY Timber land in Section 18 would appear to attain a significantly increased potential for ski village or skier accommodations development due to its close proximity to the new proposed Rumsey Mountain north chairlift, and since road access to the new chairlift will be through RY Timber land. Will this close proximity and road access to Discovery Ski Area through RY Timber land encourage potential future skier accommodations development in Section 18, and thus, provide a future indirect development benefit to RY Timber Company? The potential indirect impacts of the ski area expansion should be more fully analyzed and disclosed.

We also ask why the permit boundary for the preferred alternative, Alternative D, extends further to the north beyond the end of the ski lift and access road than other alternatives? It appears that the ski permit area for Alternative D does not need to extend as far north as is proposed in Figure 2-3 (even though the access road for Alternative D connects to a road on RY Timber lands in Section 18). The northern ski permit boundary for Alternatives B and C appears to end at the ski lift and access road, whereas the boundary for Alternative D extends somewhat further north.

We also believe that additional information should be provided to more fully describe proposed additional snowmaking and effects of snowmaking upon stream hydrology and overwintering fisheries habitat.

We are also concerned that area streams and ground water may lack capacity to assimilate increased wastewater pollutant discharges from the expanded ski area development and connected growth. The domestic wastewater load from the expanded ski area is projected to be 4,800 gallons per day, and the numbers of persons using the expanded facilities will increase by 25%. This is likely to increase wastewater pollutant loading. Secondary growth adjacent to and near Discovery Ski Area, attracted by the ski area expansion, is likely to add to the wastewater pollutant load. Septic systems discharge dissolved pollutants (e.g., nitrate) to ground water. Nitrates and some other pollutants are not removed during treatment. The effects of surge winter time pollutant loadings to area ground water should be more fully analyzed and disclosed in the FEIS.

Our additional comments, concerns, and questions regarding the analysis, documentation or potential environmental impacts of the Discovery Ski Area DEIS are enclosed for your review and consideration as you complete the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Based on the procedures EPA uses to evaluate the adequacy of the information and the potential environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives in an EIS, the Discovery Ski Area DEIS has been rated as Category EC-2 (Environmental Concerns - Insufficient Information). A copy of EPA's rating criteria is attached.

As can be seen from the enclosed comments, we are concerned about lack of information to support the expansion of the ski area; inadequate analysis and disclosure of indirect effects of induced development associated with the ski area expansion and increasing skier capacity; and effects of additional snowmaking and increased wastewater pollutant loadings to area ground water. We also have questions about the proposed permit boundary, roads, and other matters. Additional information is needed to fully assess and mitigate all potential environmental impacts of the management actions.

The EPA appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the DEIS. If we may provide further explanation of our concerns please contact Mr. Steve Potts of my staff in Helena at (406) 441-1140 ext. 232.

Sincerely

*Original Signed by*

John F. Wardell  
Director  
Montana Office

Enclosure

cc: Cindy Cody/Yolanda Martinez EPA 8EPR-EP, Denver  
Larry Timchak, Forest Service Region 1, RMLHW, Missoula  
Stuart Lehman, MDEQ, Helena  
Bob Gilman, District Ranger, Philipsburg

**EPA Comments on Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the  
Discovery Ski Area**

## **BRIEF PROJECT OVERVIEW:**

The Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Pintlar Ranger District, has evaluated three action alternatives, and no action for an expansion of the Discovery Ski Area on Rumsey Mountain. The project is located in the Flint Creek Range about five miles southeast of Philipsburg, Montana and includes a portion of the Fred Burr Roadless Area. The purpose of the project is stated to alleviate overcrowding, provide additional advanced intermediate ski terrain, minimize skier confrontations, and maximize safety.

Alternative A is the no action alternative which would maintain the existing ski area, but would not expand it.

Alternative B is the proposed action, which would encompass approximately 448 acres, including 130 acres of new ski runs, 2.5 miles of new road, 2 acres of new parking, a restaurant on top of Rumsey Mountain, expanded snowmaking capacity, and two new chairlifts with 12,000 feet. One new chairlift would service the new ski runs on the north side of Rumsey Mountain, and the other chairlift would be installed parallel to the existing chairlift on the south side of Rumsey Mountain. Skier lift capacity would be increased from 1600 to 2000 skiers. The area of National Forest lands included in the ski area permit boundary would increase from 1655 acres to 1849 acres (i.e., increase of 194 acres). The boundary modification would remove 230 acres from the Special Use Permit from the Fred Burr Roadless Area. This area had been previously set aside for beginner ski runs on the eastern side of the ski area. A 126 acre parcel within the Roadless area would be added to the Permit area by proposed new ski runs and the lower part of one chairlift. There would be 47 acres of ski runs and lifts within the Roadless area.

Alternative C was developed to address visual impacts and effects of new roads. Visual impacts were reduced by designing thinner, more numerous with sinuous shapes intended to mimic natural openings such as rock slides and avalanches. Alternative C would encompass approximately 401 acres, including 192 acres of new ski runs, 0.75 miles of new road, 2 acres of new parking, a restaurant on top of Rumsey Mountain, expanded snowmaking capacity, and two new chairlifts with 12,000 feet. Skier lift capacity would be increased from 1600 to 2000 skiers. A primitive road would be constructed from adjacent private lands owned by RY timber Inc. in Section 18 to service the new runs and lifts on the north side of Rumsey Mountain. The area of National Forest lands included in the ski area permit boundary would increase from 1655 acres to 1802 acres (i.e., increase of 147 acres). The boundary modification would remove 230 acres from the Special Use Permit from the Fred Burr Roadless Area. This area had been previously set aside for beginner ski runs on the eastern side of the ski area. A 143 acre parcel within the Roadless area would be added to the Permit area by proposed new ski runs and the lower part of one chairlift. There would be 72 acres of ski runs and lifts within the Roadless area.

Alternative D was developed to address visual impacts, effects of new roads and wildlife. Alternative D differs from Alternative C by that the ski runs would remain as with Alternative B, however, visual impacts would be feathering the edges of ski runs, varying the width of runs,

leaving islands of trees . Alternative D would encompass approximately 401 acres, including 130 acres of new ski runs, 0.75 miles of new road (although 515 feet more road than Alternative C), 2 acres of new parking, a restaurant on top of Rumsey Mountain, expanded snowmaking capacity, and two new chairlifts with 12,000 feet. Skier lift capacity would be increased from 1600 to 2000 skiers. A primitive road would be constructed from adjacent private lands owned by RY timber Inc. in Section 18 to service the new runs and lifts on the north side of Rumsey Mountain, as with Alternative C. The area of National Forest lands included in the ski area permit boundary would increase from 1655 acres to 1802 acres (i.e., increase of 147 acres). The boundary modification would remove 230 acres from the Special Use Permit from the Fred Burr Roadless Area. This area had been previously set aside for beginner ski runs on the eastern side of the ski area. A 143 acre parcel within the Roadless area would be added to the Permit area by proposed new ski runs and the lower part of one chairlift. There would be 47 acres of ski runs and lifts within the Roadless area.

## **COMMENTS:**

### **Purpose and Need**

1. The discussion of purpose and need in the DEIS indicates that the need for expansion at Discovery Ski Area is to: 1) serve increasing numbers of skiers and to avoid over crowding; 2) to enhance recreational experience by providing additional intermediate ski trails and ski trails with better snow conditions on northern exposures, and 3) to minimize skier confrontations and maximize safety. These three listed needs are not well supported by the information and analysis provided in the DEIS, and should be better supported and documented in the FEIS.

### **Increasing Skier Numbers and Overcrowding**

In regard to increasing skier numbers and overcrowding, the DEIS does not adequately support the case that ski runs are overcrowded, and therefore, that terrain expansion is needed. While the DEIS makes a good case that parking facilities are overcrowded and base area facilities are inadequate to handle current visitation rates, and indicates that numbers of skiers on weekends and holidays often approaches or exceeds the capacity of lifts and trails, the DEIS does not provide information on how many times per season skier at one time (SAOT) capacity exceedances take place, and by how much SAOT is being exceeded. It is our understanding, based on past Forest Service NEPA documents, that SAOT is not intended to be a ceiling, but a comfortable carrying capacity, and that occasional SAOT exceedances are to be expected on peak weekends.

The USFS has traditionally looked at resorts with at least 50% utilization as potentially in need of expansion (e.g., White River Forest Plan DEIS). Discovery Basin is only experiencing 30% utilization (page 1-6). We believe that the FEIS should include

information on how many times per season skier-at-one-time (SAOT) exceedances take place, and by how much SAOT is being exceeded. In addition information describing on-slope skier densities and lift line length should be provided to better support the contention that ski runs are overcrowded.

While the DEIS argues that expansion is needed *because of* increasing skier numbers, it also makes the case that the project will *result* in increased skier numbers -- by a factor of 25% (pages 1-6, 4-43). It is EPA's understanding that the Forest Service is not responsible for *creating* recreational demand on public lands, but is charged with providing a quality recreation experience while protecting the environment. We also note that this projected 25% increase of skier days over the next 10 years following expansion is less than the 41% increase in skier days stated to have already occurred from 1988/89 to 1998/99, indicating a slowing trend in skier number growth. We are enclosing an article from the June 13, 2000 Helena Independent Record entitled, "*Ski numbers down in booming economy*" that reports that skier growth is slowing due to aging of the Baby Boomers and the difficulty in attracting older people to ski slopes. We believe it is appropriate to justify the need for ski area expansion by providing more detailed information on ski slope overcrowding rather than basing expansion need on "increased skier numbers." The FEIS should include additional information to better support the contention that current or near future demand and overcrowding warrants an expansion.

#### Need for Additional Advanced-Intermediate Terrain

The need for additional advanced-intermediate terrain, as presented in the DEIS, appears to be based solely on a user-preference survey. For all practical purposes, development of new ski terrain represents an irreversible and irretrievable commitment of publically-owned natural resources. EPA generally recommends against such irreversible and irretrievable commitments where they are supported solely by subjective information. In lieu of this, the argument for more advanced-intermediate terrain could more appropriately be substantiated in the FEIS by documenting and disclosing overcrowding on the existing advanced-intermediate terrain at Discovery. Only 9% of total area of existing ski runs are stated to be advanced-intermediate (page 1-8), and we recommend that information be provided documenting that this limited availability of advanced-intermediate ski runs results in inordinate overcrowding of these existing ski runs.

#### Need to Minimize Confrontations and Maximize Safety

The DEIS indicates that Discovery is currently experiencing an accident rate 50% lower than the national average (p. 1-5), and further, that Discovery "has had very few confrontations between skiers and snow borders" (p. 1-6). While this project may indeed result in continued low confrontation and accident rates, we do not believe this should be listed as a "need" for the project. EPA has reviewed several USFS ski-expansion documents that made the opposite, but more appropriate, argument that expansion is

needed because of existing high-conflict or high-accident rates. This is the first document in our experience to attempt to argue that expansion is needed because of the existing low-conflict and low-accident rates. In fact, low confrontation and accident rates could be used to argue against the contention that ski slopes are overcrowded. In the FEIS, we recommend that this topic be described as a “project goal” rather than a “need.”

### **Indirect Effects**

2. As noted above the DEIS states (page 4-43) that the proposed expansion of the Discovery Basin Ski Area is predicted to increase skier days in 10 years by 24,545 skiers per year (i.e., from 57,455 to 72,000), or 25 % higher than current use levels. It is also stated (page 1-6) that the number of skiers per year visiting Discovery increased over the prior 10 years by 41% (from 1988/1989 to 1998/1999). Comparison of the skier growth rate over the past 10 years with that projected in the 10 years following expansion brings a couple of questions to mind. Is the projected 25% increase in skier days over the next 10 years low considering that skier days increased 41% in the prior 10 years? On what basis was a 25% predicted increase in skier days made for the 10 year period following expansion?
3. While the DEIS indicates (page 2-15) that there would be no private land development associated with the proposed expansion, clearly ski area expansions often promote and hasten nearby developments to serve the increased numbers of skiers. Such indirect effects of the proposed ski area expansion have not been fully addressed in the DEIS. **Indirect effects include growth inducing effects and other effects related to induced changes in the pattern of land use, population density or growth rate and related effects on air and water and other natural systems, including ecosystems.**

We note that the DEIS states that in the last 10 years subdivision, land acquisition, and home building on private lands has accelerated in the Georgetown Lake area (page 4-55). It is likely that expansion of the Discovery Ski Area to attract more skiers will further hasten and accelerate this growth and development. We are enclosing a copy of a newspaper article that focuses attention on the indirect or secondary impacts of ski area developments. In this article entitled, “Ski Resorts Can Be Tough On The Environment, Too” (from the March 19, 1997 Livingston, Enterprise) the author notes that, “each visiting skier requires an automobile, miles of asphalt and concrete, a sewer system, water treatment plant, restaurants, hotels, a handful of service workers, and places for those service workers to live.” He notes that, “the ski slopes themselves are not the worry, but rather the infrastructure sprouting at their toes.”

The EIS should identify indirect effects or induced changes that may be associated with the ski area expansion, or at least make a good faith effort to explain the effects that are not known but are “reasonably foreseeable”. How much developable private land lies

within easy commuting distance of the Discovery Ski Area? We recognize that future land uses near the ski area may not be precisely known, but it may be possible to consider likely land uses and development trends in the area and estimate and disclose the likelihood that land near the ski area will be developed as an indirect result of the ski area expansion.

A map showing private land adjacent to and nearby the ski area and existing and planned developments near the ski area that could serve the additional skiers would be helpful for the analysis of indirect effects. For example the RY Timber land in Section 18 would appear to attain a significantly increased potential for ski village or skier accommodations development due to its close proximity to the new proposed Rumsey Mountain north chairlift, particularly since road access to the new chairlift will be through RY Timber land. Potential for such induced or promoted development from the ski area expansion should be considered and disclosed. Will this road access to Discovery Ski Area through RY Timber land encourage potential future skier accommodations development in Section 18, and thus, provide a future indirect development benefit to RY Timber Company?

Will additional skier service, skier accommodation or ski vacation home type growth and land use change be induced on other private land nearby the ski area due to ski area expansion? Will these induced developments have an effect on air, water, and other natural systems? Are there environmentally sensitive areas such as riparian areas and wetlands or other important wildlife habitat within reasonable proximity that may be affected as an indirect response to Discovery Ski Area expansion and increased skier use? We believe these types of potential indirect impacts of the ski area expansion should be more fully analyzed and disclosed.

4. Is the Discovery Ski Area expansion consistent with Granite and Deer Lodge County Comprehensive Plans or other local Land Use Plans? The consistency of the proposed Discovery Ski Area expansion with local land use planning should be summarized and discussed in the EIS.
5. It may be appropriate to add the Great Divide Ski area north of Helena as another ski area that competes for skiers with the Discovery Ski Area in the discussion on page 3-36 regarding developed recreation. Skiers from Helena are also among those who use Discovery Ski Area.

### **Permit Boundary**

6. Review of the alternatives maps in Chapter 2 (Figures 2-1, 2-2, 2-3, on pages 2-5, 2-6, 2-7) appears to indicate that the ski permit boundary extends further north in Section 17 for Alternatives C and D than for Alternative B. The permit boundary for Alternatives B and C appears to end immediately north of the ski lift and access road, yet additional permit area north of the ski lift and access road is included for Alternative D, yet the ski trail configurations for Alternative D are very similar to that for Alternative B. Why does the



permit boundary for Alternative D extend so far beyond the end of the ski lift and access road? It appears that the ski permit area for Alternative D does not need to extend as far north as is proposed in Figure 2-3 (even though the access road for Alternative D connects to a road on RY Timber lands in Section 18).

7. Also the narrative descriptions for alternatives in Chapter 2 states that the permitted area for Alternative B would be 1849 acres, and for Alternatives C and D would be 1802 acres. It would appear that Alternative D could have a permit area somewhat less than that of Alternative C. Similarly, the narrative descriptions for alternatives states that a 126 acre parcel of the Fred Burr Roadless Area would be affected by proposed ski runs and lifts for Alternative B, and a 143 acres parcel of the Roadless Area would be affected by Alternatives C and D. If the ski runs and lifts for Alternative D are very similar to Alternative B, why wouldn't Alternative D affect less than 143 acres of the Roadless Area (i.e., less than roadless impact of Alternative C)?

### **Roads**

8. Table 2-1 (page 2-9) shows 4,500 feet of proposed new road construction with both Alternatives C and D, yet it is stated on page 4-16 that Alternative D requires 515 feet more road than Alternative C. This additional 515 feet of road does not appear to be reflected in the road construction amounts in Table 2-1. The additional road required for Alternative D is also not evident from the narrative descriptions of the alternatives in Chapter 2 (pages 2-14, 2-15). These discrepancies should be corrected.

Also, Alternatives C and D are stated to have 3/4 mile of road construction (pages 2-14 and 2-15), since a primitive road would be constructed from adjacent private lands in Section 18 owned by RY timber Inc. to service the proposed new runs and lifts on the north side of Rumsey Mountain. Will there be any additional road construction on or across RY Timber land in Section 18 to access the ski area (i.e., Is the 0.75 miles of road construction for Alternatives C and D the total amount of road construction on all land ownerships)? All road construction and improvements that are required for the ski area expansion on all land ownerships should be described. Will there be any need for road improvements or reconstruction to existing roads on RY Timber Inc. land due to the need for access to the proposed new ski runs and lifts on the north side of Rumsey Mountain?

### **Snowmaking**

9. It is stated that snowmaking would be added to three additional ski runs on the south side of Rumsey Mountain (page 4-7), and that presently a 323,000 gallon pond exists to which water is diverted from Discovery Creek (page 3-9), and that an 8 inch pipe and 500 gpm pump system supplies the existing snowmaking needs for three ski runs (approximately 10 acres) on the south side of the ski area. We have questions regarding existing and proposed additional snowmaking.

- a) How much water is presently diverted or pumped from Discovery Creek or from the alluvial aquifer to the storage pond and during what periods of the year is water diverted or pumped?
- b) Will the quantity and timing of diversions change with proposed additional snowmaking? Please describe these changes.
- c) How much additional water will be pumped from wells to provide additional snowmaking?
- d) Will the existing storage pond area or capacity change, and if so by how much?
- e) How much additional acreage will be covered by the proposed additional snowmaking?
- f) Water needs for snowmaking in some ski areas have created winter time dewatering concerns in streams, and snowmaking can also modify the timing and quantity of spring runoff, potentially influencing stream channel stability. Will expanded snowmaking on the south side of Rumsey Mountain combined with increased water yield from vegetation removal result in modified runoff patterns and increased runoff to area streams that may affect stream channel stability and/or exacerbate erosion? Will stream channel stabilization or additional erosion control measures be needed to mitigate these effects?
- g) It is stated (pages 4-6, 4-7) that pumping of groundwater for additional snowmaking is unlikely to dewater the stream and affect fish, and that water withdrawals would likely have very little effect upon the aquifer, or Discovery Creek, or down-gradient springs or seeps. We note that overwintering pools in small streams are often critical fisheries habitat, and pumping of ground water during winter could adversely impact overwintering pools. Has any analysis been done to assess potential effects of snowmaking diversions and other ski area diversions (e.g., restaurant water supply) upon overwintering pools and fisheries habitat from groundwater pumping or surface diversions? We note that the amount of groundwater diverted for additional snowmaking has not been clearly disclosed, and an amount of 4800 gallons per day is estimated for withdrawal to supply water to the proposed new Rumsey Mountain restaurant (page 4-7). What is the cumulative average reduction in Discovery Creek winter time stream flow from ski area water use diversions? We also ask if it would be feasible to store water in the storage pond during higher flows (e.g., spring flows) for subsequent winter time snowmaking use, as a mitigation measure to avoid diversions and dewatering during winter time low flow periods?

### **Water Quality/Fisheries**

10. It is stated (page 4-3) that culverts would be installed where new ski runs or roads cross streams, and that a potential culvert crossing on the south side of Rumsey Mountain

would cross a perennial stream. It is also stated (pages 3-12, 3-13) that Discovery Creek fisheries were adversely affected when the ski area was initially developed, and do not meet INFISH Riparian Management Objectives. A culvert was placed during initial ski area development that serves as a barrier to fish passage, and the outfall of the water storage pond also serves as a barrier to fish passage. While we are pleased that it is stated (page 4-16) that no culverts would be installed in the West Fork of Discovery Creek that block or impede fish passage, we believe careful design consideration for fish passage will be necessary to achieve this goal.

We also note that such fish passage design consideration was apparently lacking during initial ski area development. We recommend that knowledgeable hydrologists and engineers such as Mike Furniss, Hydrologist, Six Rivers National Forest, USFS Region 5 or Mark Weinhold, Engineer and Hydrologist, Siskiyou National Forest USFS Region 6, who recently instructed at the USFS Workshop in Missoula (May 23 and 24, 2000) on "Integrating Fish Passage, Forest Roads and Stream Crossings," be consulted to assure that further fish passage problems are not created with new stream crossings. Open bottom culverts that simulate stream grade and substrate and that provide adequate capacity for flood flows and bedload are recommended to minimize adverse fisheries effects of stream crossings.

11. We also ask the USFS to consider correcting the earlier fish passage barriers that were created with the initial Discovery Ski Area culvert installation and storage pond outlet. Can these fish passage barriers be corrected without creating additional significant adverse stream and fisheries impacts?
12. We are pleased that BMPs, monitoring and mitigation measures and INFISH standards to minimize impacts on water resources would be conducted (page 4-7). We are also pleased that an erosion control and revegetation plan will be required by the USFS prior to construction (page 4-16). We recommend that sediment and erosion control measures such as slash filter windrows and silt fences be placed between ski runs and streams to prevent sediment from reaching streams, and erosion control mats be used to speed revegetation efforts adjacent to streams.
13. Snow plowing on roads can adversely affect streams, wetlands and riparian areas. We believe that a mitigation measure restricting the ski resort operator from plowing snow from roads and parking areas into streams, wetlands, and riparian areas should be included as a mitigation measure.
14. We are pleased that a 1500 foot eroding steep straight section of an existing road on the south side of Rumsey Mountain will be replaced with a switchback section that would have better drainage (page 4-3). Is this 3,770 feet of proposed road replacement or reconstruction included in the ski area modifications shown in Table 2-1 (page 2-9)?

15. We note that Flint Creek is listed as a water quality limited water body by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). Listed waterbodies will need development of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) by the MDEQ. The TMDL process identifies the maximum load of a pollutant (e.g., sediment, nutrient) a waterbody is able to assimilate and fully support its designated uses; allocates portions of the maximum load to all sources; identifies the necessary controls that may be implemented voluntarily or through regulatory means; and describes a monitoring plan and associated corrective feedback loop to insure that uses are fully supported. While effects of the proposed ski area expansion on Flint Creek water quality appear minimal (page 4-10), we recommend that the Forest Service contact the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (i.e., Stuart Lehman at 444-5319 in Helena) to ensure MDEQ concurrence on, and coordination of, proposed ski area expansion activities in the Flint Creek drainage with the MDEQ's TMDL development for Flint Creek.
16. The DEIS does not indicate if the Discovery Ski Area currently uses, or intends to use chemicals to stabilize ski runs (e.g., ammonium nitrate or other salts). Chemicals are sometimes used for such purposes at ski areas. The FEIS should state whether Discovery uses, or plans to use, chemicals on its ski trails. Any anticipated environmental effect of chemical usage such as impacts to surface or ground water quality, or wetlands should be analyzed and disclosed.

### **Restaurant Wastewater Disposal**

17. It is estimated (page 4-7) that the proposed new Rumsey Mountain restaurant would produce approximately 4800 gallons of wastewater per day. This wastewater would be discharged to a new septic tank and drainfield disposal system. We are concerned that area streams and ground water may lack capacity to assimilate increased wastewater pollutant discharges from the expanded ski area development. Septic systems discharge dissolved pollutants (e.g., nitrate) to ground water. Nitrates and some other pollutants are not removed during septic tank-drainfield treatment and disposal. We believe increased pollutant loadings to ground water should be analyzed and discussed more thoroughly. The effects of surge winter time pollutant loadings to area ground water appear to be discounted without much analysis. Where will the proposed septic tank- drainfield system be located? Are soils and groundwater levels in this area adequate to provide treatment? We also note that secondary growth adjacent to and near Discovery Ski Area, attracted by the ski area expansion, is likely to add to the wastewater pollutant load in the drainage.

### **Fuel Storage**

18. The DEIS does not include information on the storage of petroleum products associated with snow vehicle staging areas or elsewhere. The storage of petroleum products including but not limited to gasoline, diesel fuel, hydraulic fluid, lubricating oil, and waste oil is regulated under Section 311 of the Clean Water Act, and as amended by the Oil

Pollution Act of 1990. A Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasures Plan (SPCCP) is required of any facility that at any one time stores over 660 gallons of petroleum product in a single container, or stores over 1,320 gallons in multiple containers. Wheeled containers are included for the purposes of this regulation. The SPCCP regulations are administered by EPA (contact Ms. Martha Wolf in Denver at 303-312-6839).

SPCC plans, if required, should include consideration of the specific environmental conditions at the project site, which include steep slopes and rain and snow events, and should consider risks to drinking water sources downstream of the site. Although we are not aware of any hazardous materials planned for storage or use at the ski area, should the Forest Service determine that hazardous materials will be used or stored at the site, they should contact the EPA representative at the above telephone number to determine appropriate spill prevention, control, and countermeasure.

### **Vegetation and Weeds**

19. Clearing or disturbing land for ski area developments can promote invasion and spread of weeds. We are pleased that noxious weeds are not currently a serious problem at Discovery (page 3-20), and that integrated weed management on the Forest would be coordinated with Discovery Ski Area (page 4-19). Revegetation (reseeding with native grass mix) should be considered to seed any site within the control area where the vegetation density is low enough to allow reinfestation or introduction of other noxious weeds, or erosion. The goal of the seeding program should be to establish the sustainability of the area. Mr. Phil Johnson, Botanist, Montana Dept. of Transportation, in Helena at 444-7657, may be able to provide guidance on revegetation with native grasses.
20. It seems odd that efforts to mitigate the visual impacts of ski runs with the preferred alternative will result in up to 15% additional tree harvest than included in the proposed action (page 4-55). Additional explanation should be provided to describe how more tree harvest and larger openings reduces visual impacts. We recommend that efforts to address visual concerns without such large increases in tree harvest from the proposed action be considered.

### **Air Quality**

21. The air quality of the area is stated to meet all Federal and State ambient air quality standards and is considered to be good (page 3-11). Maintenance of this good air quality should be a goal of the ski area expansion. We see little mitigation proposed for increased vehicle emissions. Skier use is anticipated to increase by 25% over the next 10 years, and there is a projected increase in vehicle traffic (page 4-12). A potential mitigation that we suggest for consideration is closing the existing parking lots by moving parking to some

offsite area along State Highway 1. Skiers could then use a bus to transport them to and from the ski area.

This alternative would; 1) Reduce air emissions; 2) Increase skier's enjoyment by not making them drive a round-trip of 4 miles to get to and from the ski area on unpaved roads; and 3) Return the existing acres dedicated to parking to a natural state (although a parking area for bus riders would then have to be constructed at the intersection of the Discovery Road and State Highway 1). Another option would be to use the existing parking area in combination with overflow parking along State Highway 1 with bus service to Discovery for overflow skiers.

There may be other ideas that could minimize air quality impacts and the "ecological footprint" caused by the ski area and its future expansion. We suggest that the Forest Service introduce an "Environmentally Preferable Alternative" with which the public and the decision-maker can make a better choice versus the current "develop as usual" alternatives.